

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vision

This Plan envisions and seeks to accomplish a system of aesthetically pleasing, conveniently located and inter-connected parks, greenways and public open spaces that provide opportunities for recreation and the enjoyment of nature for all citizens of Raleigh. This vision connects both City residents and park system facilities to Wake County and the Triangle region through greenway corridors and trails. The system actively supports the health and well being of people, wildlife, and the environment and fosters a strong sense of community, ownership and pride. Flexible, user-sensitive and innovative facilities and programs that provide a broad range of opportunities and are responsive to citizen interests are the hallmark of Raleigh Parks and Recreation.

Purpose

The purpose of the Parks, Recreation and Greenways Element of the Comprehensive Plan, referred to as the *Parks Plan*, is to set a framework for City park planners to use as they chart the course for the programming, maintenance and development of the park system over the coming two decades. This component of the Comprehensive Plan is meant to be a working document that grows and evolves as the park system develops and changes. Included within this plan are recommendations for new park development, maintenance and continued renovation of existing parks and facilities, and guidelines that will allow the system to provide ample recreational opportunities for all citizens while remaining flexible to change with recreational trends, significant development opportunities and Raleigh's growing population. Using a combination of national planning guidelines in combination with broad community and City participation, this plan provides the City with a vision for its park system to the year 2025. This Parks Plan also continues to promote the notion of Raleigh as a "park with a city in it" for future generations.

Planning Process

The development of the Parks Plan is the result of an interactive process of collaboration between the key members of the Raleigh Parks and Recreation Department staff, the Parks, Recreation and Greenways Advisory Board (PRGAB), the consultant team, and interested citizens of Raleigh. The two-year process has included analyses of existing conditions data; facilitation of a series of interactive workshops to identify issues, opportunities and recommendations; and development of maps and documents to convey these recommendations.

Community Involvement

The following methods of community involvement were used to solicit citizen input to the Parks Plan:

Public Forums: Two sets of Community Open House events (six sessions) were held in multiple locations throughout the City and at varying times of day in order to allow citizens several opportunities to provide their input.

Parks, Recreation and Greenways Advisory Board (PRGAB): The PRGAB provided input during the analysis process and reviewed the preliminary Parks Plan. The Project Team met with the PRGAB three times during the planning process.

Web-Based Project Updates: Periodic updates summarizing project progress were posted to the Parks and Recreation section of the City’s website and interested parties were encouraged to provide input on any part of the Parks Plan throughout the process via an e-mail link.

Public Review of Parks Plan Documents: As a part of the web-based project updates, a preliminary version of the entire Parks Plan has been posted for citizen review and comment. The final version of the Parks Plan will also be posted.

City Council: Upon acceptance of the Parks Plan by the PRGAB it will be recommended to the City Council for approval and publicly presented. Following the formal presentation, a City Council public hearing will be held to solicit citizen input prior to the Plan’s adoption.

Plan Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives below, in conjunction with related recommendations (Chapter 7) and action steps (Chapter 8), enable this vision to be carried out by City staff, elected officials, and community volunteers.

Goal 1: Provide park and open space opportunities to all residents.

Objectives

- Provide adequate land for future development by placing a priority on land acquisition.
- Develop a system of parks and recreation facilities that meets current and future needs of the citizens of Raleigh.
- Provide facilities and programs that serve a broad cross-section of the City's residents.
- Develop recreational facilities that are universally accessible (ADA compliant) to all citizens.
- Develop recreational facilities that are within close proximity of all residents.

Goal 2: Provide a diverse, well-balanced, well-maintained range of recreational facilities.

Objectives

- Develop park and recreational facilities that provide a wide range of recreational opportunities and that offer varied experiences to residents within close proximity to their home.
- Encourage effective and citizen-responsive use of City recreational facilities and programs
- Capitalize on the value of park and recreation facilities to improve the overall aesthetic character of the City and as a means of promoting livability.

Goal 3: Optimize the appreciation, use and stewardship of Raleigh’s historic, cultural and natural resource heritage.

Objectives

- Promote and ensure stewardship of Raleigh’s natural resources
- Develop and maintain parks and greenways using nationally-accepted sustainable design principles and best management practices.
- Promote preserve and ensure protection of Raleigh’s cultural and historic resources.
- Develop environmental education and interpretive facilities.

Goal 4: Provide the opportunity for community involvement.

Objectives

- Ensure meaningful public participation in the planning of park facilities.
- Inform citizens of plans and available services to promote active participation in the success and future direction of the parks system.
- Develop leisure opportunities that are responsive to the needs of Raleigh's citizens.
- Encourage volunteerism and other forms of private sector involvement.

Goal 5: Encourage intergovernmental collaboration.

Objectives

- Continue to pursue additional opportunities to coordinate and cooperate with Wake County, the Wake County Public School System, neighboring municipalities, the State of North Carolina and Federal agencies (e.g. US Army Corps of Engineers and Federal Highway Administration) in the acquisition, development and use of parks and recreational facilities.

Goal 6: Encourage private recreation initiatives to supplement public facilities.

Objectives

- Explore opportunities to encourage the private sector, both for-profit and not-for-profit, to provide additional depth and breadth of recreational facilities and activities.
- Partner with the private sector to provide recreational needs that the public sector cannot or is not providing.

Demographics

The City of Raleigh is one of the fastest growing areas in the country. From 1970 to 2000, the population of Raleigh more than doubled. In the past decade, the population of Raleigh and its planning jurisdiction grew by 28.2 percent, from 237,056 to 303,971. It is projected that the area within Raleigh's extraterritorial jurisdiction will grow by approximately two percent each year in the foreseeable future and that by the year 2025, Raleigh's population will exceed 541,000.

Recreation Participation and Preference Survey

A Recreation Participation Preference Survey was mailed to a random sample of 5,500 Raleigh households. The total response rate formed a statistically sound sample and was also representative of the results of the 2000 Census. The survey asked citizens to report their participation in many activities found within the parks system in the past 12 months and their overall interest in these activities. These data were compiled and analyzed to determine the current demand (actual participation) and the latent demand (representing the difference between actual participation and desired participation) for each activity. A full explanation of survey results can be found in Chapter 5 and latent demand for each activity can be found in Chapter 6.

Existing Conditions

At present, the City of Raleigh is home to over 7,700 acres of parkland and Greenways that allow opportunities for active and passive recreation and provide urban open spaces within the community. This system includes a broad range of dedicated parks that are classified in the following manner:

- Mini Parks (14)
- Neighborhood Parks (37)
- Community Parks (21)
- Metro Parks (8)
- Wetlands and Ecological Preserves (0; typically included within other categories)
- Special Parks (101)

Each park type currently includes guidelines for size, service area, character, and a range of typical facilities. Special Parks include undeveloped urban open space, outdoor theaters and places of special cultural and historical significance. These unique facilities add to the great variety of recreational opportunities offered by the City to its residents and are thus an important part of the overall parks system.

Needs Analysis

Recreation facility needs were determined in this plan by calculating three estimates: latent demand, population service requirement, and level of service. The first estimate indicates a possible level of latent demand that exists; this is the difference between the proportions of the participants using facilities in Raleigh and the proportions of those residents in the community that have a high to very high interest in an activity but are not currently participating in a given activity. Next, a population service requirement was determined to provide an estimate of the number of individuals served annually by the current facilities and services. Finally, the level of service (LOS) that current facilities provide for the current population was determined. These calculations are evaluated to determine the quantity of facilities needed to satisfy participation of residents with a high to very high interest in an activity who are not currently participating. As a means of verifying the accuracy of the results of these three calculations, input received during public meetings, comments submitted, staff reports and discussions with the PRGAB were reviewed with respect to the facility needs to ensure that plan recommendations would reflect the desires of the community.

Estimates of needed facilities for activities, as well as overall parkland acreage by park classification are projected for future needs based on projected population growth. In establishing the current LOS for a given activity, results from the resident survey were used to estimate participation and interests in various activities. These results will require ongoing evaluation by park planners to determine optimal strategies for meeting unmet demands; these strategies will likely include a combination of facility development, program expansion, and partnering opportunities to expand programming to satisfy unmet demand.

It is important to understand these estimates within the overall context of the Parks Plan. Although these estimates are derived from the recreation participation preference survey, numerous other factors will affect what is actually developed in the coming years. It will be necessary for park planners to continually consider:

- Degree of consistency between the public input received at meetings, through other correspondence and feedback, and from the survey results.

- Evaluation of actual population change over time versus population growth projections; and changes in recreational trends and, thus, facility needs over time.
- Staff interpretation of the results with respect to barriers to participation. (e.g. Are there existing vacancies / underutilization of facilities for which latent demand has been identified? If so, why? Can increased marketing of programs improve awareness?)
- Alternatives to building additional facilities. (e.g. Are there opportunities to collaborate with nearby communities or private groups who could provide the unmet demand for certain recreational activities? Can programs be developed utilizing existing facilities?)

Choices will need to be made since it is unlikely that the Raleigh parks system will be able to develop facilities to accommodate all of the latent demand for all recreational activities. Park planners should focus on providing a wide range of facilities within parks and seeking creative ways in which private facilities and partnerships with other municipalities or organizations can supplement the City's facilities.

Facility Recommendations

The recommendations of this plan are included in Chapter 7 and have been organized to respond to the goals and objectives summarized above and in Chapter 4. These recommendations are intended to:

- establish a structure by which park facilities can be developed with a consistent level of quality yet allow for flexibility and variation at the master planning level for each park unit;
- set the appropriate number of parks, by classification, that will be required by the year 2025 in order to meet LOS targets;
- identify specific ways in which the City can strive to develop or enhance stewardship programs, community involvement and partnership opportunities; and,
- provide the planners and officials within the Parks and Recreation Department with the necessary tools to further evaluate and weigh the needs of the community on balance with physical and financial constraints as they strive to provide the best possible facilities to the citizens of Raleigh.

Specific recommendations include:

Place a Priority on Land Acquisition: Recognizing that prime lands for Natural Areas and park development are disappearing quickly within the ETJ, it is recommended that the City seek every opportunity to acquire these prime lands as they become available.

Provide a Balanced Dedicated Usage of Parkland: The City needs to institute a process by which the System Integration Plans (SIP) and Master Plans of all existing and future parklands clearly delineate the intended use for the park, and set aside lands for future recreational development and resource conservation.

Provide an Equitable Distribution of Facilities Across the Community: This recommendation addresses the rationale for the spatial distribution of recommended parks across the City. It also recommended that, while still maintaining a long-term goal of providing Neighborhood Parks within ½ mile of all residents, an initial goal of providing Neighborhood Parks within one mile of residents be instituted first.

Plan For Flexibility: This recommendation outlines a parks classification system that includes a recommended base set of facilities to be included in each park within a classification and additional recreational facilities that would be appropriate for each classification but would be intentionally

varied between parks in order to provide a greater range of activities to users within a given area of the City.

Incorporate Universal Design: All phases of new park facility planning and implementation should reflect universal design principles as a primary goal. Existing parks should also be examined for their ADA compliance; and a process should be developed within renovation and maintenance programs to bring all parks into compliance.

Recommended Parks Classifications: Five basic park classifications are recommended to meet the diverse recreational needs of Raleigh's citizens into the future.

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| Natural Areas: | Both Conservation Areas and Greenway Corridors are contained within Natural Areas to ensure that Raleigh's natural and cultural resources be conserved for future generations. Conservation Areas will be implemented as an overlay concept that allows portions or entire units of existing and future parklands within other classifications to receive a stewardship plan. While no service area distances are identified for this classification, Greenways are recommended to include the lands on either side of the stream top of bank at a distance of 100', or the entire delineated floodplain area on either side of the stream centerline, whichever distance is greater. |
| Neighborhood Parks: | Serve the daily recreational needs of citizens.
Range in size from 5 to 25 acres
Serve residents within a ½ -mile radius
This classification also includes existing Mini Parks as they can be utilized as a supplement to Neighborhood Parks where land of sufficient size is not available or where opportunities for smaller parks exist. |
| Community Parks: | Provide many of the features of Neighborhood Parks as well as additional features that meet expanded or unique recreational needs.
Range in size from 30-75 Acres
Serve residents within a two-mile radius |
| Metro Parks: | Provide a leisure or recreational opportunity, which, either by size or scale or theme, will appeal to a majority of citizens. Examples include Lake Wheeler and Pullen Park. |
| Special Parks: | Includes facilities such as Cultural and Civic Centers and remnant City parcels. Special Parks often fulfill important recreational niches, but due to their wide variety of facilities, do not carry level of service, size or proximity requirements. |

Develop New/Upgraded Parks: The following tables summarize the recommended new parks by classification, based on Level of Service and spatial distribution goals.

City-Wide Current and Proposed LOS Goals and Needs

Classification	Existing Acres	Existing Number of Parks	LOS Standard (Ac/1000)	Additional Needed Acres by 2025	Projected Park Size	New Parks Needed to Meet 2025 LOS	Total Parks Needed by 2025
Neighborhood Parks	518.16	42*	2.6	860.76**	20 ac	43	85
Community Parks	1203.78	21	3.1	476.09	60 ac	9	30
Metro Parks	2268.52	8	4.2	7.44	300 ac	0	8
Special Parks	918.33	101	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	101
Greenway Corridors	2578.52	N/A	N/A	3450	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	7410.21	172	9.9	4794.29	N/A	52	224

* Includes five School Parks that are recognized as currently serving community needs as Neighborhood Parks

** Presumes six acres equivalent for each of five school parks currently functioning as Neighborhood Parks

City-Wide New Parks Needed to Fulfill LOS by Year

Classification	New Parks Required to Meet LOS				Total New Parks Needed by 2025 to meet LOS
	2002	2005	2015	2025	
Neighborhood Parks	12	7	12	12	43
Community Parks			3	6	9
Metro Parks					0

Utilize Recommended Facilities Per Park: This section outlines recommended facilities to be included within each Neighborhood, Community and Metro Park. These recommendations serve as a guide to the master planning of new facilities and to renovation planning for existing facilities.

Evaluate the Need for Public Swimming Pools: This section outlines the current facilities, previous studies and expressed demand for public swimming facilities. A basic structure for further study by the City to address these needs is recommended.

Utilize Facility Space Guidelines: Space requirements for each activity typically found in parks and recommendations regarding orientation of fields and field size options to meet various sports regulations are provided.

Enhance Access to and Awareness of Raleigh’s Recreation Opportunities: Raleigh parks system currently includes a wide variety of recreational opportunities of which many residents may not be aware. The City needs to set a primary goal of increasing awareness of these to promote public involvement in the park and recreation system and encourage active living, which can offer significant health benefits.

Improving the Aesthetic Character of the City and Promoting Livability: The ultimate livability of the City of Raleigh depends upon numerous factors, many of which have ties to parks and recreation opportunities and the overall aesthetic quality of City-owned lands. These recommendations stress that by treating elements such as urban rights-of-way, alternative transportation routes and trails and natural areas as high-quality urban amenities Raleigh can become a more livable community.

Encourage Stewardship of Parklands and Awareness of Ecological Principles: A dedicated focus on parkland Stewardship within the Department is recommended to become one of the key elements in both the continued maintenance and upgrading of existing facilities as well as in the System Integration Planning and Master Planning processes of all new parkland. The City’s environmental stewardship and conservation efforts should complement similar efforts being undertaken by Wake County and adjacent municipalities. These recommendations recognize that while the City of Raleigh has the immediate responsibility for resources within its City limits, ecological systems do not recognize these boundaries; thus there is great benefit to coordinated, complementary efforts by entities throughout the region.

Promote, Preserve and Ensure Protection of Raleigh’s Cultural and Historic Resources: Cultural and historic resources within the community also provide a unique opportunity for the Raleigh parks and recreation department to provide varied recreational and leisure opportunities for its citizens. Facilities such as historic homes, performing arts and arts education centers and public places with cultural themes can provide alternative opportunities to active recreation facilities and represent prime opportunities for community interaction and partnerships with other agencies and organizations.

Provide Environmental Education Opportunities: In conjunction with a commitment to the conservation and stewardship of natural lands environmental education efforts will help to educate the Citizens of Raleigh about the ecological systems and processes within their own neighborhood. More affective advertisement to make citizens aware of these current opportunities is also recommended.

Encourage Public Involvement: The success of the parks and recreation system depends upon the support and involvement of the entire community. Recommendations are made to ensure that parks master planning engages surrounding neighborhoods and addresses community needs. Both national and local trends should also be tracked to encourage new park development and renovations to remain synchronized with public demand.

Utilize School Parks: This recommendation highlights the great opportunity to partner with the Wake County Public School System in order to provide Neighborhood Park facilities to underserved areas of the community while enhancing school lands.

Collaborate and Partner with other Communities and Agencies: The City of Raleigh is committed to providing a very broad range of recreational opportunities and the best possible service; however, every service or facility that residents’ request cannot be provided. It is important to recognize that parkland and recreation facilities belonging to adjacent communities, as well as County, State and Federal agencies, can often fulfill some of these needs. Partnerships with non-profit groups and athletic clubs and with private corporations can also meet some of this demand. These collaborations and partnerships are very important to the success of the Parks Plan as outlined in Chapter 6. Building

strong partnerships will alleviate some demand for resources and allow the City to allocate funds to other needed facilities in its effort to provide a diverse and well balanced parks and recreation system

Collaborate with Non-Profit Groups, Athletic Clubs and the Private Sector: As it may not be possible or desirable to satisfy the recreational needs of the community with City resources alone, The City is recommended to explore ways in which non-profit groups and athletic organizations can support the City's initiatives to meet the LOS goals set.

Implementation Strategies

The following priorities are intended as a guide to the City as it pursues the Level of Service goals and recommendations of the Parks Plan. The implementation of the Parks Plan will simultaneously require systematic approaches on many fronts in order to succeed. This will also require the City to seize opportunities as they arise to secure parklands, funding and partnerships that become available.

Policy Priorities

- Adopt the Parks Plan
- Utilize the Parks Plan and the System Integration and Master Planning processes in all new park planning efforts
- Adopt Greenway Corridor modification
- Implement the revised Facility Fee structure
- Conduct the recommended swimming pool study
- Implement Land Dedication and Fees-in-Lieu of dedication
- Implement strategies for assessing and addressing citizen expectations and revising the Parks Plan and funding levels
- Continue reinvestment in existing parks to maintain facilities
- Ensure public involvement in all Master Plan and System Integration Plan endeavors
- Utilize the development of new park facilities and upgrading of existing facilities to enhance the aesthetic character of the City and to promote livability
- Identify strategies that enable protection of Raleigh's natural resources through environmental stewardship and sustainable design practices
- Actively promote, preserve and protect Raleigh's historic and cultural resources

Acquisition Priorities

- Pursue a dedicated, persistent strategy of acquiring parklands
- Acquire parkland for New Neighborhood Parks to achieve the goal of one-mile service area coverage throughout the ETJ and in keeping with population growth
- Seek and acquire land with outstanding natural resources.
- Acquire parkland for new Metro Parks.
- Acquire parkland for new Community Parks
- Acquire parkland for New Neighborhood Parks to achieve the goal of ½ mile service area coverage throughout the ETJ and in keeping with population growth

Development Priorities

- Develop new Neighborhood Parks to meet the current deficit giving priority to areas that are currently underserved by Neighborhood Parks
- Evaluate School parks and identify potential improvements in collaboration with the Wake County Public School System
- Seek additional opportunities to make the outstanding resources of State and Federal agencies accessible to Raleigh residents
- Delineate Natural Areas (Conservation Areas within existing parks; and new Conservation Areas and Greenway corridors)
- Prepare and implement stewardship plans for Conservation Areas
- Develop Multi-Use trails within Greenways to expand recreational opportunities and to create a complete trail system
- Develop swimming facilities per the results of the swimming pool study
- Develop Forest Ridge Park on Falls Lake as a Metro Park in coordination with USACE
- Develop Neighborhood Parks to achieve the goal of ½ mile service area coverage throughout the ETJ
- Upgrade selected Mini Parks to Neighborhood Parks
- Develop new parks in a manner that ensures universal access to recreation facilities
- Evaluate existing parks with respect to ADA compliance and develop a process for upgrading these facilities
- Evaluate existing park system marketing programs and develop strategies to increase awareness of Raleigh's extensive existing park facilities and programming opportunities